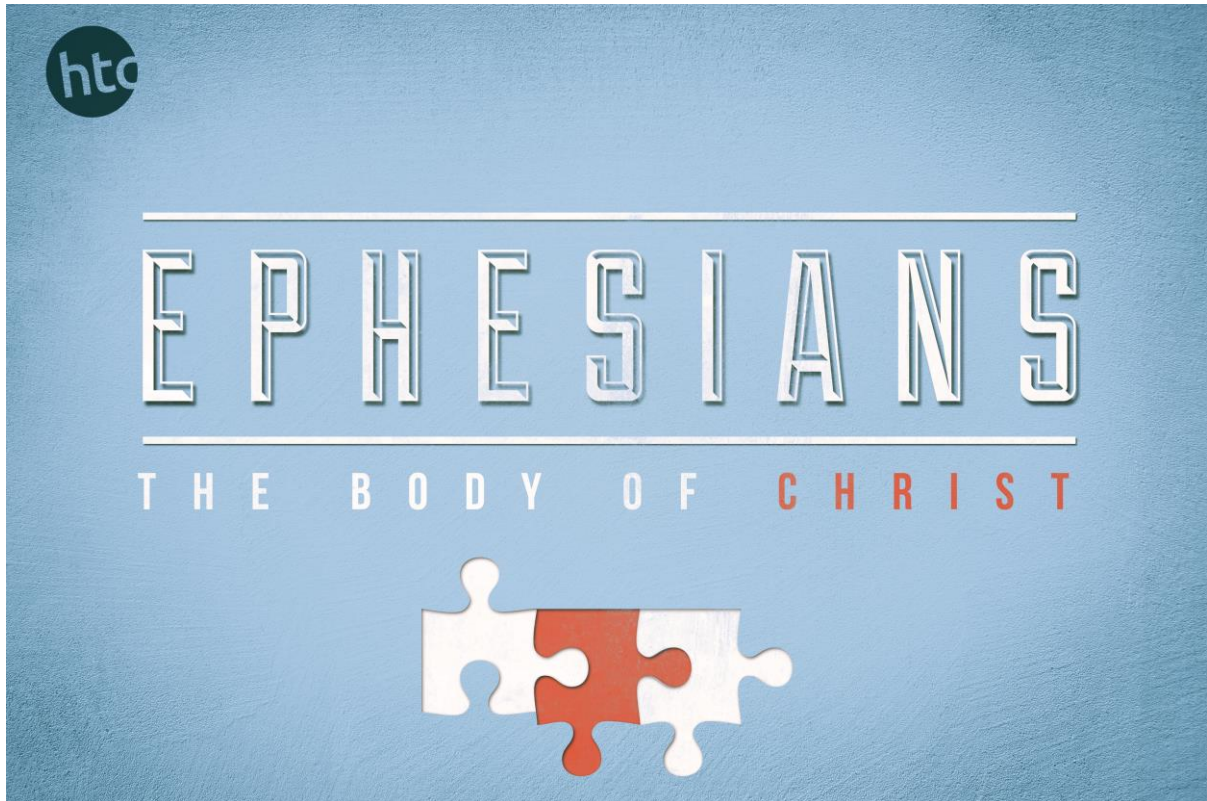


Holy Trinity Claygate



Ephesians

Small Groups Study Material
Summer 2015

Study 1: Introduction - Ephesians 1:1-2

Preparation

- before this session, read the whole of Ephesians (possibly in a translation that is unfamiliar to you). As you do so:
 - underline the words that strike you as significant / main themes.
 - put question marks next to words / passages that you find hard to understand.
 - put asterisks by phrases you find personally encouraging / challenging.
- come prepared to share reflections in your group.

Introduction

- share one reflection from your experience of worshipping at Easter (whether at HTC or elsewhere). What aspect of the story and good news of Christ made an impact on you this year?
- what do you find most challenging about living out your faith Monday - Saturday?

Ephesians is a letter which reminds us what the good news of Christ is all about, and encourages / challenges us to live that out in our daily lives. In this study we look at the letter as a whole before we study it carefully in the weeks to come.

Read Ephesians 1:1-2

- on a flip chart / large piece of paper, capture everything you know about the apostle Paul (the author of this letter).
- looking at Acts 18:24-19:41 and 20:17-38, what sort of place was Ephesus and what relationship did Paul have with the church there?
- in what ways is Paul trying to encourage his readers in these opening two verses?
- in what ways can we be described as 'saints' and 'faithful'?

Ephesians Today

- share your responses to reading the letter as a whole:
 - what struck you as the important words / themes?
 - what questions did it raise?
 - what did you find personally encouraging / challenging?

Ephesians is split into two sections.

- Chapters 1-3 deal with the content of the gospel (the multi-faceted good news of God in Christ).

- Chapters 4-6 deal with the implications of the gospel (the way of living Christ calls us to).

And throughout the letter there is an emphasis on the community of faith (the church) and not just the faith of the individual.

- what role has the community of faith had on your journey as a follower of Jesus Christ?

Prayer

- reflect on the challenges / questions captured during the study and ask God to help you address them in the term ahead.
- pray that others in the group / church will be blessed as we hear God's voice.
- pray for a situation you are facing in living out your faith Monday - Saturday.

Study 2: Every blessing - Ephesians 1:3-10

Introduction

- what are some of the things which today's society considers to be 'blessings'? Where do these things come from?

In this passage Paul is praising God for the blessings he has lavished upon us. The whole of this passage (in fact, verses 3-14) is one single sentence in Greek, as Paul pours out his praise to God without stopping for breath or full stops!

Read Ephesians 1:3-10

- make a list of all the blessings in this passage.
- how do we see God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working together in blessing God's people?
- how do these blessings relate to the past (v4), the present (v7) and the future (v10)?

Ephesians Today

- what difference does it make to know that God 'chose us in him before the creation of the world' (v4)? How does this encourage us to a) holiness? and b) humility?
- how is your day to day life affected by the blessings we have received in Christ? What changes could you make in order to live increasingly in the light of the grace we have received?
- Paul wrote this letter from prison - yet he had his eyes fixed on the eternal perspective of God's plan of salvation. How can we help each other at HTC to focus more on this eternal perspective?

Prayer

- give thanks to God for the blessings we have received in Christ.
- pray for those who don't yet know these blessings - you may want to pray by name for those known to you, perhaps those friends who you invited to events during Life to the Full.
- pray that each of us, as individuals and as a church community, would keep our eyes fixed on the eternal perspective and seek to live in the light of the grace we have received.

Study 3: Amazing grace - Ephesians 2:1-10

Introduction

- what does the word 'grace' mean to you?

From chapter 2 of Ephesians, Paul begins to get into the detail of how God will accomplish the great plan he outlined in chapter 1 - to bring all things in heaven and earth together under the lordship of Christ (1:10). He begins, in this passage, by describing God's salvation of individuals by grace.

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

- how does Paul describe the condition of the Ephesians before they came to know Christ? What influences did they follow?
- what does it mean to be 'objects of wrath' (v3)?
- what has God done for us (vv4-7)? Why (v8)?
- what is our part in God's salvation plan (v10)? What is **not** our part (v9)?

Ephesians Today

- based on this passage, how would you explain to a friend what it means to be a Christian?
- why is it important to remember that salvation is by grace, not by our works or human effort?
- how does this passage motivate us to a) praise God; and b) share the good news with others?
- if you feel comfortable doing so, encourage one another by sharing with the group something of your own journey of faith, and the difference that God's grace has made in your own life.

Prayer

- spend a few moments quietly reflecting on your own life before you became a Christian. Then join together to give thanks to God that he made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions, and saved us by his grace.
- pray for those who don't yet know Christ for themselves - you may want to pray by name for those known to you, perhaps those friends who you invited to events during Life to the Full. Pray for each other as we seek to share the good news with them.
- pray that, as individuals and as a church, we may be committed to serving Christ by doing those 'good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (v10).

Study 4: A people united - Ephesians 2:11-22

Introduction

- what has been your experience of living in / visiting a place with barriers between different groups (e.g. racial, ethnic, economic)? What was the nature of the barriers? Was there any way the barriers were being broken down?

In this passage the apostle Paul explores how the major barrier in the ancient world (between Jew and Gentile) has been broken down in Christ, bringing unity where there was division.

To understand this passage you need to remember the central role that the Temple in Jerusalem had for Jews in the first century. It was *the* place where Jews went to worship. The Temple had a number of different courts and walls beyond which certain people were not able to go. One wall was a barrier beyond which Gentiles could not pass. It effectively kept them distant from accessing God's presence in the Temple.

Read Ephesians 2:11-22

- what was the nature of barrier before Christ (vv11-12)?
- what are the different ways in which Christ has brought unity where before there was division (vv13-18)? How did he do this?
- how does this work of Christ alter the status of Gentile believers (vv19-22)? How are they the new temple?

Ephesians Today

- 'remember who you were and who you now are in Christ'. In what ways is it valuable for us to remember the gospel as Paul presents it in vv11-22? How does this a) humble us; and b) build us up?
- what barriers are present in our society today (think of where you live, work, socialise)? How does Jesus accepting you challenge you to break down those barriers?
- how does HTC demonstrate / live out the way Christ has broken down barriers? In what other ways could we live out this aspect of the gospel?

Prayer

- pray for situations in our country and world where there are barriers, that the power of God in Christ will break them down.
- pray for your own witness in breaking down barriers between yourself and others.
- pray for HTC's living out the gospel of Christ breaking down barriers.

Study 5: Strength to know God - Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

- describe a time when you have learned something from a Christian whose background is different to yours (in age, denomination, nationality ...).

In this passage Paul pours out his heart to God as he prays for the Christians in Ephesus.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

- Paul begins 'for this reason' (v14) - which is a return to the thought he began in v1 and then interrupted. What is the reason for his prayer (look back to ch 2)?
- make a list of all the requests in this prayer. What themes stand out?
- given that Paul is writing to Christians, why does he pray for Christ to dwell in their hearts (v17)?
- why does Paul emphasise that it is only possible to grasp Christ's love together with 'all the saints' (v18)? How do other Christians help us to know Christ better?

Ephesians Today

- 'one of the best ways to discover a Christian's chief anxieties and ambitions is to study the content of their prayers and the intensity with which they pray them'. What would your prayers say about you? What would you like to change?
- in what ways might HTC change if we began to pray like this for each other more regularly?
- what opportunities could you take in order to make the most of learning about Christ's love from, and together with, Christians with different backgrounds from your own?

Prayer

- come to God individually and confess any shortcomings in your own prayer life, asking for his help as you seek to grow in this area.
- spend some time praying this prayer for each other, and for all of HTC. You might like to have someone read the prayer aloud, one phrase at a time, with a few moments silence in between phrases to echo the words in your heart.
- pray that we would be humble and open to learn from others .

Study 6: Growing deeper and closer - Ephesians 4:1-16

Introduction

- what is the best team you ever been part of (in any context)? In what ways was it united and why did this matter?

In this study we begin to look at the 'so what' of the gospel, the impact on our daily lives. The first theme Paul explores is how, as we grow deeper in Christ, we need to be closer to one another.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

- what are the signs that this is a new section of the letter? What is Paul's headline here?
- why does Paul believe unity in the church is so important (vv3-6)?
- how might the characteristics in v2 contribute towards unity?
- why do you think Paul needs to be so clear here?

Read Ephesians 4:7-16

- how does Paul make it clear that unity does not mean uniformity?
- what is the purpose of God-given gifts, as explored in vv12-16?
- what is to be the evidence of 'growing up' as outlined in vv12-16?

Ephesians Today

- why does the unity of the church matter today? How is it part of our witness?
- what do you do to maintain and work for the unity of the Spirit in our Christian community?
- in what ways are you with others seeking to become mature in your faith and service?

Prayer

- thank God for the wonderful unity he has made available to the church.
- confess any ways you have contributed to disunity.
- pray that you know what it is, with others, to 'live a life worthy of the calling you have received.'

Study 7: Holy living - Ephesians 5:1-20

Introduction

- if someone is described as 'holy' what does this say about them? What other words would describe that person?

In this passage Paul continues the 'so what' of the gospel, and addresses the question of holy living, exploring the reasons why it matters how we live now that we belong to Christ.

Read Ephesians 5:1-20

- read through this passage and list all the sins we are told to avoid. What do you notice about the range of these?
- what motivations and reasons does Paul give for the importance of living a holy life:
 - in vv1-2?
 - in vv3-4?
 - in vv5-7?
 - in vv8-14?
- what are the characteristics of a wise person (vv15-17)?
- what are the results of being filled with the Holy Spirit (vv18-20)?

Ephesians Today

- Paul tells us to 'be very careful... how you live' (v15). How can we take care of our Christian life? How could we live more wisely?
- which of the sins mentioned by Paul tend to be tolerated in our society / church today? How can we help each other take holiness seriously?
- how do we at HTC live out the call to a Spirit-filled life described in vv18-20? How could we grow in this area?

Prayer

- spend a few moments in silence, confessing to God areas of sin in your own life that have come to light as a result of this study.
- pray together that we might grow in purity and holiness, and that we might help each other in these areas.
- if possible, sing a hymn or worship song together to praise God, and spend some time in thanksgiving to him.

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Study 8: The armour of God - Ephesians 6:10-24

Introduction

- what protective equipment have you ever worn (bike helmet, shin guards, gloves)? What were the risks you were seeking to address?

In this final study we look at the protection which the apostle Paul encourages the Ephesian believers to put on – in the face of a real spiritual battle.

Read Ephesians 6:10-24

- how does Paul describe the opposing power in vv11-12?
- why do you think Paul mentions standing four times in vv11-14?
- what is the overall usefulness of the 'armour' that Paul describes in vv14-17?
 - how might individual items of armour be helpful in certain situations?
- what role does Paul see prayer playing in spiritual battle (vv18-20)?

Ephesians Today

- 'There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.' (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*) Which error are we more likely to fall into today?
- God has given us his armour, but it is our responsibility to put it on, according to Paul. What do you need to do in order to put it on?
- how do you need to shape your prayer life so that you can engage in the spiritual battle through prayer?
- which passage in Ephesians has spoken to you most through this term's studies?

Prayer

- spend some time quietly reflecting on the battle and the armour.
- ask God to give you wisdom and strength for the battle and to help you put on the whole armour of God.

